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# The Relational Artist

- *embodying the language of multiplicity to promote  
alternative narratives and collective transformation*

## Introduction

In this essay I share my reflections on my most recent performance *Timing is Divine* by contextualising the work using a personal, experiential, as well as a socio-political, psychological, historical, and philosophical lens. I will substantiate why this work matters for myself, for the audience, and for its targeted time and space.

By examining the dualistic thinking in Western Philosophy, I argue how our contemporary capitalist society disregards the body in favour of a superior mind. By studying the capitalist critique expressed by thinkers such as Silvia Federici and Herbert Marcuse, I provide examples of “relationality” as an alternative to dominant modern belief systems. Moreover, I investigate Van Der Kolk’s theory of the difference between right and left brain consciousness<sup>1</sup>, which suggests how trauma can be healed through physical activity. By embodying multiple identities, and applying an imaginative language of paradox and question, analogous to Taoist and Gnostic literature, I propose the ways in which performance can seek to activate the audience to feel and think for themselves, rather than controlling the outcome of their

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<sup>1</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014)

experience. I argue that as the performer, my intention is to first create a situation in which the audience is encouraged to *listen*. I articulate how the language of music, poetry and performance art can stimulate the emotional brain and body, and how this helps us creatively respond to a world in its current state of urgency. Finally, I analyse how the ritual concept of *Rites of Passage* can support the composition of transformative performances.

I demonstrate this overall research as constitutive of my decision making in the creation process of *Timing is Divine*. My leading research question for this essay is: *how did Timing is Divine successfully incorporate the multitude of my research?*

## *Timing is Divine* - The Performance

For my final master's degree show in June 2022, I created a solo performance titled *Timing is Divine* which primarily consisted of me playing a drum kit for thirty minutes straight. I began the performance by slowly hitting each drum one by one while counting the numbers of the drumming patterns out loud, eventually moving into a drumming-only section based on repetition, polyrhythms, shifts in patterns and gradual changes. Successively, I began playing louder, faster and finally more freely and off-beat, reaching a climax of chaos and collapse around the halfway mark of the performance. After a short moment of silence, I moved onto singing Elvis Presley's *Can't Help Falling In Love With You* in an enacted Presley-esque voice, accompanied with a standard pop beat. Thereafter, I played a minimal groove using

only cymbals while reciting an ancient gnostic poem called *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* - a poem filled with paradoxical utterances from what seems to be a divine feminine voice of absolute power. I finished the performance singing the Swedish folk song *Uti Vår Hage* accompanied with a slow drumbeat.

Except for the apparent drum kit at the centre of the room, the scenography was kept minimal. The studio space was sparingly lit, slowly fading towards darkness, finishing the performance in a total blackout. I had sewn a costume in black, aesthetically concordant with the black drums, the black studio flooring, the white walls and white ceiling of the space. The audience was sat in a semi circle surrounding the drum kit.



*Timing is Divine: stage setup*

After the performance, many audience members reported feeling *embodied*, *recentered*, *enchanted*, *energised*, *awakened*, *mindblown*. Some persons remarked

that they felt they were *deep inside a state of trance and connected to the universe*. Someone pointed out that the performance felt *like a conversation*.

Interestingly, all these remarks resonated with the process of making the work. This leads me to my initial proposition - the idea that *you first have to give to yourself what you would like to give others*. Tolstoy famously exclaimed "*in our world everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself*."<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, I use myself as a conduit for the world, arguing that if personal transformation is possible, so is collective. This is the basic idea of "as above, so below" - an idea which I am in constant pursuit of. This principle is frequently used in belief systems that practise *relationality* - a concept which differs from individuality and is further explored in a later section of this essay.

Using the principle of "as above, so below" - I view myself as a mirror to the world. Before asking what the world needed, I began the creative process for *Timing is Divine* with the simple question: *what do I need?* - which immediately led me to consider *my own body*. This was due to having recently undergone a series of experiences in which I had deeply considered my body. I thus began the process with a deep reflection on these recent experiences, which was followed by further research and contemplation of the view of the body in modern society.

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<sup>2</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Some Social Remedies* (1900) ch. 3

## Becoming Nature

As a result of my life slowing down during the Covid-19 pandemic, I reconnected with my body on a profound level. I got deeper into doing a daily yoga practice, and I felt myself moving through many emotions and deep-seated stress which seemed to have since long been physically stored within my body. I willingly chose to disconnect from the online world in order to reconnect with the “offline world”, and increasingly began feeling that the nature around me was an extension of my body. With all five senses fully awakened, I felt an almost childlike curiosity toward my environment. As I spent time in nature, I recognised the inherent rhythm in everything; my breathing, the day and night, the seasons of nature. This anchored me to the present moment, and filled me with the joy of partaking in this rhythm. It was a lived experience of healing, after which I came out feeling young and light.

Moreover, the lockdown experience was also one of *solitude*. During the first two weeks of lockdown, I felt uncomfortably lonely, because losing my connection to civilization made me lose my sense of identity. However, simply by spending time in my garden and observing the birds nesting there, I no longer felt alone, as I recognised myself as inherently connected to my surroundings. This time spent in privacy allowed me to renew my relationship with my body without external gazes and social pressure, thus it became a kind of social disintegration. I began feeling more feral, and more at home in my body. As external input and distractions were reduced, my perception of myself and of the world sharpened, and I felt at ease with having less. A tactual and more direct relation to the world grew forth, in which I felt

that having my body and having the day and night to spend my time within, were gifts in and of themselves - the gifts of *time and space*.

My lockdown experience could be likened to Arnold van Gennep's three phases of *Rites of Passage*<sup>3</sup>; *separation* - in this phase, I separated from life as I knew it, I felt confused and detached. I was grieving, working through many emotions and reflecting on my past. This was followed by *liminality* - the uncertainty of the present. In this phase, I felt curious and receptive. Time was abstracted, and I was only able to engage with the present, unaware of my future and detached from my older version of self. Finally, I reached *incorporation* - the embodiment of a new self. In this phase, I gained a renewed faith and self conscience. I had a distinct perception of my life and knew what I wanted for my future. What supported me through this experience was my dedication to a daily practice of body movement and creative exercises. Perhaps I frequently undergo similar cyclical transformations in my life, yet the lockdown presented this experience in such a crisp and unfiltered way, making me viscerally and intelligibly aware of such transformations.

In 2021, I began playing guitar and singing in a band<sup>4</sup>, in which we would jam for hours on end, allowing our music to spring forth organically and effortlessly. In this state of flow, we did not question the decisions we made, but simply listened and responded without judgement. Through the process of jamming, I realised that *music is primarily about listening, and secondly about playing*. It also became evident that when I allowed my body to be soft, supple and in motion, my playing became more attentive and harmonious, as if the sounds I was making were purely expressions of

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1909)

<sup>4</sup> TELEPATHS, <https://telepathss.bandcamp.com/album/afterparty>

my body. My new understanding of “listening” extended beyond just my sense of hearing and comprehending music. Listening entailed “how I receive” which has its roots in how I relate to the world, and to what extent I am open to receive my surroundings. Coming from a musical practice, I was aware of music’s ability to foster active listening, and henceforth I chose to further engage with the musical language of drumming with the making of *Timing is Divine*. The project became a pronounced exploration of the ways in which a performance can first tend to *the act of listening*, before beginning to explore potential themes.

Having undergone these experiences, I could easily acknowledge how all the vast infrastructure of urban cityscapes which surrounded me in London at the time of creating the performance, were latently pushing me to disregard my body.

Considering my own socio-political context as a white person who has grown up within a Western culture, I wanted to understand what view of the body I had inherited through my culture. Thus, I began examining the Western history of the human body.

## The Western View of the Body

The body and mind dichotomy, evident in the writings of Plato, implemented a dualistic thinking in which there was always a thesis and antithesis; one essentially good and the other essentially evil. The good was henceforth supposed to control the evil. The body was sinful and irrational, affiliated with matter - a category which



was also applied to women and nature, while the mind was good and rational, associated with spirit, man and God. This way of thinking led to the patriarchal justification of dominating and objectifying women and nature.<sup>5</sup> This dualism radically differs from that of for example Taoism, in which the aim is to achieve balance between opposites; the yin and yang.<sup>6</sup>

Following the Renaissance and scientific revolution, Europe underwent the process of industrialisation and original primitive accumulation of capital<sup>7</sup>. The transformation of our bodies, as well as the animals and nature, into working machines was one of capitalism's main projects<sup>8</sup>. Considering that a fundamental pillar of capitalism is the rejection of the body, we can conclude that capitalism does not encourage us to listen to, and feel, our bodies. In turn, this leads us to suffer both physical and neurological consequences.

After studying Western Philosophy and its view of the body, I decided to use the physical practice of drumming when making *Timing is Divine*, so as to put the disregarded body at the centre of the piece. Aiming to reappropriate my own body by engaging with its creative capacities to express emotion and imagination, I desired to invite the audience to undergo a similar experience. Furthermore, the drumming was also intended to reestablish the lost connection between humans and nature.

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<sup>5</sup> Jack Holland, *A Brief History of Misogyny*, (Robinson, 2006) ch.1: Pandora's Daughters

<sup>6</sup> Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, circa 400 BC

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx. *Capital Volume One* (1867) ch.26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation

<sup>8</sup> Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* (PM Press, 2020) p.10

# Individuality versus Relationality

The West has promoted the idea of *individuality* and the fetish of the autonomous man (autonomous from both nature and women)<sup>9</sup>; whereas many non-western belief systems suggest *relationality* - which is also a core concept in decolonial thinking<sup>10</sup>.

Relationality can be defined as connectedness; a view of the world in which existence means being in relation, therefore no one and no thing can exist in isolation.

In West African tribes, the djembe drum is said to consist of three spirits: the spirit of the tree from which the wood is chopped; the spirit of the animal from which the skin is taken; and the spirit of the human who assembles the materials<sup>11</sup>. This echoes how the Celtic traditions<sup>12</sup> in present day Ireland and the Sámi traditions<sup>13</sup> in present day northern Scandinavia use animistic belief systems, in which everything in nature is infused with spirit; in fact, spirit and matter are never separated to begin with.

Evidently, relationality has also existed on the grounds of Europe. The hegemonic history of the West is a history of state domination, monotheism, ecological exploitation, colonialism, and white-male-supremacy. It is from this history that the scientific, and later the technological revolution was born. Keeping an awareness of this particular historical perspective, I remain critical towards a culture which celebrates technology as useful, intelligent and creative. After having undergone the transformative reconnection with my body and nature during the pandemic, I

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Holland, *A Brief History of Misogyny*, (Robinson, 2006) p.17

<sup>10</sup> Walter D. Mignolo & Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (2018) Introduction

<sup>11</sup> Kristin Stancato, *Spiritual Significance of the Djembe* (<https://www.x8drums.com/> 2014)

<sup>12</sup> Miranda Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*. (Routledge, 1992)

<sup>13</sup> *Nordisk Familjebok "samer"* (1993, Corona AB) p.1925-1926

possessed a desire to make my expression more natural, as in less dependent on technology. Opposing modernism, I wanted to view nature, to which my body belonged, as complete in and of itself, without the need of controlling or improving it.

Relationality suggests a different definition of existence than that of the prominent renaissance phrase “*I think, therefore I am*”<sup>14</sup> which promotes that a singular mind validates one’s existence. I believe that it is when we reconnect to the feeling of being an inherent part of nature that we begin to care for the world around us. Thus certain urgent issues, such as climate change, may have their roots in a false idea of autonomy and an aggressive domination over the natural world. I would henceforth rephrase such a quote as “I relate, therefore I am”.

By becoming aware of the history of Western philosophy and its repercussions in everyday societal structures, one can question the way in which the West has treated, and still treats, indigenous peoples as “primitive” and “less developed”, when they in fact know perfectly well how to live in harmony with their environment, and more in general how to maintain balance between the binaries. The process of evolution is not necessarily a process of improvement: it is merely a process of change. As a person who resonates with the Taoist teaching that “lack of simplicity is not cleverness”<sup>15</sup>, I furthermore suggest that perhaps being primitive comes from a profound understanding, as well as a maintenance, of balance; a kind of sophisticated intelligence that is often disregarded in a culture which teaches us to celebrate complicated innovations, technologies and the linear idea of “newness”.

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<sup>14</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)

<sup>15</sup> Laozi, *Tao Te Ching* (circa 400 BC) edited by Joseph Lumpkin (2019) ch. 67

This is why I am interested in studying alternative narratives than that of the Western colonial narrative.

## Highlighting Alternative Histories

Upon applying the mindset of relationality, I can no longer dissociate myself from my surroundings. Whether or not they seem distant or foreign, I still always remain in relation to them. This vows for a more interconnected and empathetic relationship towards “otherness”. I can then begin to acknowledge the narrative of the ones who have been assigned as “the other”. Knowing the narrative of the colonial West, I can instead question what the narrative is from the perspective of those who have been colonised. Moreover, I can ask; what would be the historical narrative from the viewpoint of the oceans or forests, after decades of humans exploiting these living systems? As a result of colonialism, the Western culture has become the global culture. Western ideals thus control our values, deciding what we regard as “normal”, what is right and wrong and so forth. As a white person who is an active artist within a white culture, I believe it is my duty to listen, consider, and even adopt alternative narratives, as an act of decoloniality.

Since the exploitation of nature and animals is linked to the oppression of women, and this furthermore is rooted in a violent dualism, one can fully grasp what feminism addresses as its core. Yet, mainstream feminism often fails to address the interconnectedness of oppressions, partly due to the fact of being controlled by capitalist interests. Thus, social movements can often become individualistic and monocultural, essentially reproducing capitalist structures by competing with other

social movements in pursuit of their favoured agenda. If we obtain an alternative historical awareness, as well as a relational existence, we may realise that many struggles are interconnected, which could foster a more loving exchange between cultures and social movements. An interest I have with my art is thus to highlight the disregarded narratives, suggesting a reimagination of history.

For instance; the Sámi people in Northern Scandinavia have been victims of oppression by the Swedish state, yet this chapter of history was not taught in my mandatory education as I was growing up in Sweden. The shamanic ceremonial drum, used by the Sámi people to call in spirits and enter into a state of trance during rituals, was banned and burnt at the stake by Scandinavian authorities in the late 17th and early 18th century<sup>16</sup>. This coincided with the European witch hunt, during which women who refused to give up their agency to own their own bodies, were also burnt at the stake<sup>17</sup>. During this so-called “age of reason”, i.e. Renaissance, any form of “magical practice” had to be destroyed since it was a threat to the new industrial world order. Once again, my Swedish education dismissed the witch hunts as “tragic events”, caused by some random Christian frenzy. If we look further into these frequently overlooked chapters of Western history, we can see obvious political reasons behind the actions of silencing alternative belief systems, since they were a force of resistance to the tyrannical industrialisation of people and nature.

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<sup>16</sup> *Den Svenska Historien 1, Från stenålder till vikingatid* (Bonnier Lexikon, 1992)

<sup>17</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, 2004)

Another group which was silenced due to their alternative beliefs, were the Gnostics. They were early “Jesus followers”, who practised a deviant form of Christianity<sup>18</sup> which promoted the idea of “as above, so below”;

*“For what is inside of you, is what is outside of you*

*(...)*

*And what you see outside of you, you see inside of you”*

- From *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*<sup>19</sup>

Part of the reason why I chose to include this Gnostic poem in my performance, was to ask the audience to consider the history of Christianity, and thus the history of the West, as one which is also *diverse*. This suggests that the issues of corruption, hegemony and unilateral narratives are longstanding struggles within our culture. Acknowledging this, we are invited to consider that bigger themes hide behind the spectacles of current situations.

If we do not engage with the multifaceted history of the past, we may become oblivious to the core issues of current struggles by overlooking their deeper historical roots. It is thus important to consider that - since history is written by its winners - those who write history have, perhaps unconsciously yet nonetheless prevailing, a certain agenda, thus they are never neutral. For example, patriarchy may want to erase any evidence that there have ever been matriarchal societies, so as to shut down any potential imagining of an alternative system. The same goes for late capitalism, as expressed in *Capitalist Realism*; *“it is easier to imagine the end of the*

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<sup>18</sup> Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to Gnosticism: Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (Oxford University Press 2013)

<sup>19</sup> *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* (circa 4 AD), translation by George W. MacRae (1973)

*world, than it is to imagine the end of capitalism*<sup>20</sup>. Erasing alternative narratives, silencing people and censoring information is a recurring power tool to uphold biased narratives, and it is henceforth crucial, as well as productive, to research alternative histories. Rather than buying the narrative that e.g. the middle ages were “the dark ages” and that “things are at least better now than they were then”, we can remain in question of what we are taught as *the truth*, and instead view *truth* as *multiple* and as *an ongoing process*.

## Embodying Relationality in Solo Performance

Considering relationality and alternative perspectives of the past, I made many creative decisions in the making of *Timing is Divine* which promoted an idea of not only being an individual self, but moreover embodying a multitude of various histories and identities. Using drumming as a central activity was partly born from a desire to resurrect the culture of the Sámi people whose ceremonial drums had been burnt at the stake. Furthermore, the Swedish folk song *Uti Vår Hage* - which served as the finale of the performance - mentions a range of herbs, flowers and berries in the lyrics. It has recently been speculated whether these plants in fact compose a recipe for an abortion potion. This idea greatly excites me, since my study of the European witch hunts has illuminated that such medicinal knowledge did exist, predominantly among women, prior to the industrial revolution. Yet this type of knowledge had to be erased in favour of the new world order in which women became incarcerated housewives breeding new labour power<sup>21</sup>. This erasure was

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Zero Books, 2009) ch.1

<sup>21</sup> Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* (PM Press, 2020) p.14

effectively achieved through public executions of witches and the consequent mass scare that this produced in society. It thus felt like a poignant choice to include this song in the performance, not to mention the political issues concerning abortion rights which remains an ongoing struggle today.

Another example of relationality in *Timing is Divine* was my choice of singing “Can’t Help Falling In Love With You”. I wanted to avoid the audience viewing me as only “otherworldly” and instead see me as someone who was also of their world and culture. At the same time, I desired to embrace a sense of humour in order to let people feel lighter and therefore safer, while also promoting a curious multitude of perhaps contradictory sentiments. Embodying Elvis Presley - a male rock’n’roll stereotype - plays with the idea that I am merely a channel, a (gender)fluid character who is not only what I appear to be, and who is not only “different”, but who instead embodies the paradoxes of history as a means to seek comprehension of the mystery of our times. By embodying a *plural self*, I question the hegemonic patriarchal definition of self which has assigned women as *the other*. By creating cultural dissonance, I produce an unusual and unexpected expression which challenges the audience’s perception of the world and of themselves.

Moreover I felt held by the various identities I embodied on stage. Despite it being a solo performance, I did not feel alone in doing it - on the contrary, I felt surrounded and supported by the universe. This also produced an impact on the audience after which they reported having felt similar feelings themselves. It was as if we were all undergoing the same experience. I merely happened to be the one carrying out the task for the collective.



# The Imaginative Mind

Studying marginalised histories has made me feel that as an individual, I am partaking in many ongoing collective struggles; e.g. misogyny, ecological exploitation, colonial rule and moreover the “war on magic”. The so-called “war on magic” is especially interesting when considering art making. It stems from a patriarchal and secular idea that rationality and science is truth. I view art as a form of magical practice, since it uses an imaginative expression which deals with the negative spaces that exist outside of rational understanding. However that does not make artistic expression untrue. There is a difference between communicating what *is*, and what *could be*.

*"The young people today in America, want truth (...) while all the young English kids that I met, want alternatives."*<sup>22</sup> - Morton Feldman

This reflection from Feldman has provided major impetus for me, because I find that searching for alternatives is an attitude focused on change and fluidity rather than rigidity. From my perspective, this to me is the essence of “being progressive”, and consequently, it is the kind of attitude I want to use in my praxis. Research has shown that the two hemispheres of the brain speak different languages, with the right hemisphere being intuitive, emotional and tactual while the left is linguistic, sequential and analytical<sup>23</sup>. This suggests that Plato’s idea of the “mind as rational” only refers to “left brain mentality” and thus disregards half of the brain. The right

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<sup>22</sup> Morton Feldman in conversation with John cage (part 3 at 3:40 min, radio show recorded at WBAI, New York City, December 28th, 1966)

<sup>23</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (Penguin Random House UK, 2014) p.52

brain develops in the womb, and can be referred to as the “primary knowing” i.e. intuition. The left brain, which deals with intellectual and explicable knowing, develops later when a child begins to use spoken language<sup>24</sup>.

Thinkers such as Marcuse suggested that capitalism is a new form of totalitarian social repression which uses thought control to create false needs in order to keep us consuming and working<sup>25</sup>. Reflecting upon the idea of capitalist thought control, I have often contemplated the ways in which the cunning language of advertisement mainly uses second person singular, for example “don’t you want this?” or “buy this, and you will feel this”. This type of direct address cuts deep into our subconscious and sense of self, yet in the case of advertisement, its hidden, sole purpose is to make you purchase a product. *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* also uses the ‘I’ and ‘You’, but embodies a language of paradox;

*“Why, you who hate me, do you love me  
And hate those who love me? (...)*

*I am strength, and fear*

*I am peace, and war has come because of me”<sup>26</sup>*

Incorporating a paradoxical language in my performance pushed my audience to imagine what lies behind words, and thus challenged them to reconnect to their intuition - their “primary knowing” - their *gnosis*. In Gnostic literature, as well as in Taoism, we find a language of riddles, with a central focus on *the question* and not

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<sup>24</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (Penguin Random House UK, 2014) p.52

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, (1964)

<sup>26</sup> *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* (circa 4 AD), translation by George W. MacRae (1973)

the answer. The nature of letting the question and mystery guide rather than the answer also resembles what James Baldwin expresses:

*“One cannot possibly build a school, teach a child, or drive a car without taking some things for granted. The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides.”*<sup>27</sup>

We do not only engage in conversation to inform others about the truth, but we look for a truth that is constantly changing in a changing world. We need to remind ourselves that we are shapers of that change. If we always compete about the truth, we favour domination and singular truths instead of exchanging different beliefs. In order to not reproduce the unilateral culture of Western hegemony, it has been a vital lesson for me not to dominate the outcome of my performances, but rather to keep them mysterious, ambivalent and humble.

*“True words are not pleasing. Pleasing words are not true. Wise men don't need to prove their point. Men who push their point are fools. Those who know they could be wrong, are learned. Those who are certain they know, are ignorant. The master has no possessions. He hoards nothing. The more he gives, the more he has. The more he serves, the happier he is. The Tao pierces the heart, but does not harm. The Tao nourishes, by letting go. By not dominating, the master's obligation is done.”*<sup>28</sup>

- Laozi

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<sup>27</sup> James Baldwin, *The Creative Process* (from *Creative America*, Ridge Press, 1962)

<sup>28</sup> Laozi, *Tao Te Ching* (circa 400 BC) edited by Joseph Lumpkin (2019) ch. 81

Applying the Taoist relation of master - student to the performer - audience relation, I see myself as the performer whose role is *not to dominate*. Thus, the experience I intend to offer is open to interpretation, allowing for a diverse range of responses. By focusing on alternatives and questions, without imposing a message, I managed to convey a great sense of mystery with *Timing is Divine*, after which members of the audience either felt speechless, found themselves in tears, or expressed how the impact had been visceral.

Since the right brain is tactual, intuition is something we sense within our bodies. Thus, by listening to our bodies, we gain another kind of truth that is not rational. In *Timing is Divine*, I intentionally kept my scenography minimal, so as to subdue visual input in favour of connecting my audience to the invisible realm of intuition. While preparing for *Timing is Divine*, I practised playing the drums daily for an entire month. This physical exercise had a profound effect on my body. It satisfied my inherent needs, making me feel calm, centred, joyful and energised. My mind felt clear, unaffected by any exterior distractions. It was an experience of disintegration from capitalist life, and in times when “*it is easier to imagine the end of the world, than it is to imagine the end of capitalism*”<sup>29</sup> - we urgently need to find ways to satisfy our needs without capitalism.

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<sup>29</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Zero Books, 2009) ch.1

## Performance as Ritual

When humans engage in a ritual, they are invited to undergo the aforementioned *Rites of Passage*<sup>30</sup>. This is an intentional transformation, in which they give an emotional expression of their heart and body, through visceral and “irrational” action. This stimulates the right brain, and it is henceforth interesting to note that trauma is located in the right brain. Thus, explaining, analysing and talking about the trauma cannot heal it - we need to *act it out*. This is something that Western psychology has often failed to recognise, seemingly because of its ideas of reason over emotion, mind over body and so forth. Trauma shuts down our inner compass, breaks down our attuned physical synchrony, and robs us of the imagination we need to create something better<sup>31</sup>. Since the right brain is intimately connected to our sensory nature and bodily awareness, the path to healing should begin with the reappropriation of our bodies.

Returning to the principle of “as above, so below” we may zoom out from mere personal trauma and instead consider broader cultural and intergenerational trauma. We then witness a culture that seems hopeless, violent and cynical, which clearly shows a culture in great need of “healing”. Let us imagine that I, as a performance artist, want to make a performance about healing. I would not simply express that “I need healing” or “our culture needs healing” or “my culture does not grant me any healing”, because these are merely left brain facts. Instead, I would set out to *heal myself* and furthermore aim to give my audience *an experience of healing*, or simply, aim to *heal them*, even if only momentarily. If I only speak about a problem with the

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<sup>30</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1909)

<sup>31</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (Penguin Random House UK, 2014) p.113

off-stage world, I merely reproduce the same problem on stage. I here, once again, stress the idea that *one first needs to give oneself, what one would like to give others*. The experience of making and performing *Timing is Divine* became evidence that it is possible to heal oneself, and consequently others, through performance.

Since studying the ritual process<sup>32</sup>, I have been able to consciously utilise this knowledge when composing my work. Considering the journey I intended to take my audience on in *Timing is Divine*, I began the performance with a universal reference to the everyday act of counting, calling for the rational mind to pay attention.

Following this, I began twisting the count by reversing it, letting my audience know that I intended to enter a landscape of *liminality*, where truth would be a quest rather than an answer. Once within the liminal sphere, I sought to achieve a state of trance using the practice of drumming to create a polyrhythmic flow which can be likened to West African ritual music, followed by a climactic free jazz expression of chaos and a successive physical collapse. Once within this state of heightened perception, I delivered paradoxical utterances by first embodying Elvis Presley, followed by the divine feminine power in the *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*. Choosing to finish my performance by highlighting erased histories of women can be understood as the *incorporation* of a new truth.

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<sup>32</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Routledge, 1969)

## Conclusion

*Timing is Divine* was a success insofar as it managed to shake me, my audience and concludingly the universe. With the making of this performance I have learnt a great deal about my own methodology, the fundamental lesson being that one first needs to give oneself what one aims to offer an audience. By first tending to what my own body needed, I was able to produce a performance in which the sentient body became central in delivering the piece, which auspiciously generated a healing, visceral impact on the crowd while also generating a heightened receptive nature among them. This was an act of revitalising the creative capacities of the body to counteract how it has, in turn, been rejected and exploited as a result of Western dualism and modern capitalism.

Through studying narratives that have been silenced due to a one-dimensional history of the world, I challenged the foundation of contemporary belief systems. To provide an alternative to Western individuality, I rooted my practice in relationality, which promotes my inherent connectedness to my surroundings and to the audience. By embodying a multitude of identities and paradoxical utterances, my expression reached beyond rational thinking, stimulating the imaginative capabilities of an often disregarded right brain hemisphere. This brought my audience into the negative spaces of alternative thinking; an urgent need in times of lacking imagination. The performance could be likened to a ritual, causing the cohort to move through the different stages of *Rites of Passage*. By shaking the present with my entire being, I confronted it on a multidimensional level, and pushed myself and my audience to grasp the immensity of what we are, and what we *could be*. In the

temporal unfolding of my performance, I used the principle of “as above, so below” to demonstrate that if personal transformation is possible, so is collective.

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